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## **Bad Eggs**

Country of Origin: Australia

Production companies: A Million Monkeys, Double Yoker Films, Roadshow Films

Director: Tony Martin

Producers: Stephen Luby, Tony Martin, Greg Sitch

Screenwriter: Tony Martin

Director of Photography: Graeme Wood

Production Designers: Carrie Kennedy, Ben Morieson

Editor: Peter Carrodus

Genre: Comedian Comedy, Thriller

Duration: 96 minutes

Cast: Mick Molloy, Bob Franklin, Judith Lucy, Shaun Micallef, Bill Hunter, Alan Brough, Robyn Nevin, Marshall Napier

Year of release: 2003

## **Synopsis**

A magistrate, Rodney Poulgrain (Chris Peters), gasses himself in his car after receiving an envelope containing photographs of his visits to a brothel. As he falls unconscious, he knocks the car into gear. It careens down the road and into a shopping centre where two undercover detectives, Ben (Mick Molloy) and Mike (Bob Franklin), give chase on foot. The now-dead Poulgrain ends up in another car, which crashes into a fountain. Ben and Mike shoot the corpse numerous times. With their inept police work splashed across the front page of the local newspaper, their commander Gillespie (Marshall Napier) has no choice but to remove them from a major corruption case they are investigating, and demote them to uniform duties. They are sent to Poulgrain's house to tidy up, only for Mike to accidentally burn the house down. The two bumbling officers then disrupt Poulgrain's funeral. Journalist Julie (Judith Lucy), a former police officer and Ben's former partner, gleefully reports their transgressions. The officers who take over Ben and Mike's corruption case, Wicks (Nicholas Bell) and Pendlebury (Steven Vidler), arrest Julie for blackmail, alleging she sent the photographs to Poulgrain. An envelope she sent to Poulgrain has been found in his car. Believing Julie to be innocent, Ben deduces that the envelope contained a computer disk revealing extensive police and political corruption. He discovers that Wicks removed the disk from the car, and doctored his report to make it appear as though the disk had never existed. Ben and Mike search Julie's apartment in vain for a duplicate disk, but are secretly photographed by Wicks. Shortly afterwards the apartment is destroyed in a mysterious explosion. Wicks kills Gillespie and Pendlebury to prevent the extent of the corruption being discovered, and to allow the unit's original head, Ted Pratt (Bill Hunter), to take over again. Ben and Mike convince police computer technician Northey (Alan Brough) to help them hack in to the police system to obtain a copy of the disk that will confirm that many of their colleagues have been receiving kickbacks. On presenting the evidence to Pratt, they discover that the file has been hacked. They are framed for corruption, and for the explosion which destroyed Julie's apartment. Wicks plants a bomb in Mike's house. Ben and Mike manage to escape, but are captured by Wicks and taken to an isolated location. They are confronted by Pratt, who orders them to be shot. Northey saves them, and they escape. Ben and Mike kidnap the state Premier (Shaun Micallef) after overhearing him confirm his involvement in the scandal, and obtain files and audio evidence detailing the extent of the corruption. They arrange to swap the Premier and the files for Julie Bale. Pratt attempts to double cross them, but he is arrested along with the Premier and his accomplices. The unit is disbanded. Ben and Julie are reunited.

## **Critique**

*Bad Eggs* represents a change of direction for first-time writer-director Tony Martin and his collaborators (Mick Molloy, Judith Lucy, and Bob Franklin) away from the straight-out comedy work in radio, television and film that made their names, in to the sub-genre of the political thriller. While Martin dutifully incorporates many of the genre's key conventions and semantic elements – low-level innocents discover a network of corruption involving the police, politicians, and casino operators, only to be threatened by the conspirators, and framed for the misdeeds of their colleagues and superiors – these are overshadowed by the comedians and the comedy. To its credit, the film never quite tips over in to parody, but the serious and somewhat convoluted plot about police graft and political corruption is undercut not only by the use of actors more familiar as comedians in the lead roles, but also by the fact that the actors play thinly veiled versions of themselves. The characters played by Mick Molloy and Judith Lucy in particular are almost indistinguishable from their carefully honed comedian personas; the former slovenly, careworn and blokily incompetent, the latter mordant, sardonic and icily bitter. Their acting styles are examples of what Barry King terms 'personification', in which an actor plays a role that is close to their own personality or image (King 1991, p. 130). Personification is perhaps most common in film comedies in which established comedians are cast precisely in order to reproduce the personality or image familiar from their prior comedy work. But while the mode works well in comedy, it is less successful in films like *Bad Eggs* that straddle genres (comedy-thriller) and require the comedian-actors to play more rounded characters and to go beyond a purely comic role.

Given the backgrounds and connections between the key cast and crew, it should come as no surprise that the banter between characters and the elaborate comic set pieces (which include cinema's slowest car chase) are the real strengths of the film. Although this was Tony Martin's first feature as writer-director, he and several of the film's other leading lights – particularly Mick Molloy but also Lucy and Franklin, Shaun Micallef, and Gina Riley who appears in a minor role – had a history of collaboration prior to *Bad Eggs*. All are long-standing members of the loose collective of comedians based in Melbourne that grew out of, or spun off from *The D-Generation*, an ABC/Seven Network television series (1986-89), and breakfast radio show (1986-1992). The collective – which also includes key Australian comedy figures in Rob Sitch, Santo Cilauro, Tom Gleisner, Jane Kennedy, Jane Turner, Michael Veitch, and Magda Szubanski – would, in various combinations, go on to produce some of the highest profile and most popular films, radio and television comedy series over the last three decades, including *The Castle* (Rob Sitch, 1997), *Fast Forward* (1989-92), *Full Frontal* (1993-97), *The Late Show* (1992-93), *Big Girls Blouse* (1994), *Frontline* (1994-97), *Kath and Kim* (2002- ) and *Thank God You're Here* (2006-09). Martin and Molloy began their collaboration as writers and later as performers on *The D-Generation*, before going on to become core members of the ABC television sketch comedy series *The Late Show* in the early 1990s. They returned to commercial radio in the highly successful *Martin/Molloy* show (1995-1998), before working again in television on the *Mick Molloy Show* (1999), which also featured *Bad Eggs* collaborators Judith Lucy and Bob Franklin. Unfortunately the attempt to reproduce the radio show's loose mix of sketch comedy, chat, and music for Saturday night television did not appeal to executives at the Nine Network, and the series was cancelled after only eight episodes. Martin later had small roles in the feature films *Crackerjack* (Paul Moloney, 2002) and *BoyTown* (Kevin Carlin, 2006), both of which were co-written by and starred Molloy, although the two reportedly fell out over the non-inclusion on the *BoyTown* DVD of a mockumentary, directed by Martin, about the film's fictional band.

**Ben Goldsmith**

## References

King, Barry (1991) 'Articulating Stardom' in G. Jeremy and B. Bulter (eds) *Image and Performance in Film and Television*, Detroit : Wayne State University.